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ABSTRACT

Designed to measure discrimination of prose excerpts, the Literary Discrimination Test (LDT) includes nine pairs of passages for the respondent to choose between, and one set of four passages to be rank-ordered. One of each pair of passages and one passage from the set of four were from publisned novels; the others were rewritten and inferior versions of the original. In the final version of the test, only those items were included for which there had been complete agreement by a panel of twelve secondary English teachers and three college English professors. Thirty minutes are required to administer the LDT. The test-retest (after five months) reliability is .75; The Spearman-Brown theoretical reliability is .84. [This document is one of those reviewed in The Research Instruments Project (TRIP) monograph "Measures for Research and Evaluation in the Language Arts" to be published by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. A TRIP review which precedes the document lists its category (Literature), title, author, date, and age range (senior high, postsecondary), and describes the instrument's purpose and physical characteristics.] (JM)

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NCTE Committee on Research

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CS 201347

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
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Category: Literature

Title: Literary Discrimination Test

Author: W.S. Harpin

Age Range: Senior High, Post Secondary

Description of the Instrument:

Purpose: To measure discrimination of prose excerpts.

Date of Construction: 1961

Physical Description: The LDT includes nine pairs of passages for the respondent to choose between and one set of four passages to be rank-ordered; one of each pair and one of the set were from published novels, the others being re-written and inferior versions of the original. In the final version of the test only those items were included for which there had been complete agreement by a panel of twelve secondary English teachers and three college English professors.

The LDT requires approximately thirty minutes to administer. Scoring is two points for each correct choice with the pairs, ten points for the correct rank-ordering, with decreasing points awarded for other less correct orders. Maximum score is therefore 28.

Validity, Reliability, and Normative Data:

The test-retest (after five months) reliability is .75, the Spearman-Brown theoretical reliability, .84.

The table below reports tryout data for three groups. Figures are percentages of success as a percentage of all responses. The increasing percentages of success provide support for the content and construct validity of LDT.

	Part I (Pairs)									Part II (Rank-ordering)
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Age 15-18	31.7	35.0	41.3	30.7	27.0	20.7	44.4	25.4	29.0	22.2
Age 21	39.0	42.4	49.5	65.5	35.0	22.5	58.0	30.0	35.0	19.0
Adults	93.0	93.0	93.0	100.0	100.0	64.0	68.0	64.0	72.0	100.0

The report where LDT appears contains an analysis of respondents' reasons for their choices.

Ordering information:

EDRS

Related documents:

W.S. Harpin, "The Appreciation of Prose," Educational Review, 19 (November 1966), 13-22.

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W. S. Harpin

LITERARY DISCRIMINATION TEST

a) This test has two parts. In Part 1 choose the preferred passage from each pair, basing your choice on the appeal made by subject matter, treatment, style and vocabulary. Note the chosen passage down - e.g. A1

b) In Part 11 put the four extracts in descending order of preference, according to your personal choice.

c) Write the name of author, or title of novel, if either is recognized.

d) If you can, write down the reasons for your preference.

e) Write down any words or phrases not understood.

f) Give an estimate of the number of novels you read, on average, per week. If none, write this down.

PART 1.

1. He was trembling. His knees were so weak under him that when he passed through the Gateway of the Close, and saw a seat under a limetree, he made towards it and sat down. He felt helpless, bewildered, for the disappointment, coming as the last of many such disappointments seemed to have fallen upon him with the cumulative weight of the whole series. He put a hand into his pocket for his pipe and pouch. His fingers moved jerkily, and when he lit a match his hand was so unsteady that he had difficulty in lighting his pipe. The nausea of an intense discouragement was on him. He felt tired, so tired that his impulse was to lie down and admit defeat, and to allow himself to be trampled into the mud of forgetfulness. His senses were dulled, and the whole atmosphere of this quiet old town had changed. Half an hour ago he had been vividly aware of the blueness of the sky and the tranquil white-domed clouds floating above tower and tree, but now the objective world seemed vague and grey. His feeling of despair cast a shadow.

2. Nancy waded out to her own rocks and searched her own pools, and let that couple look after themselves. She crouched low down and touched the smooth rubber-like sea-anemones, who were stuck like lumps of jelly to the side of the rock. Brooding, she changed the pool into the sea, and made the minnows into sharks and whales, and cast vast clouds over this tiny world by holding her hand against the sun, and so brought darkness and desolation, like God himself, to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures, and then took her hand away suddenly and let the sun stream down. Out on the pale, criss-crossed sand stalked some fantastic leviathan (she was still enlarging the pool) and slipped into the vast fissures of the moutain side. And then letting her eyes slide imperceptibly above the pool, and rest on that wavering line of sea and sky, on the tree-trunk which the smoke of steamers made waver on the horizon, she became, with all that power sweeping savagely in, and inevitably withdrawing, hypnotized.

B.1. She started forward at once, as if she were still a loyal woman, bound to that man by an unbroken contract. Her right hand skimmed slightly the end of the table, and when she had passed on towards the sofa, the carving knife had vanished without the slightest sound from the side of the dish. Mr. Verloc heard the creaking plank in the floor, and was content. He waited. Mrs. Verloc was coming. As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step. But Mr. Verloc did not see that. He was lying on his back and staring upwards. He saw, partly on the ceiling and partly on the wall, the moving shadow of an arm with a clenched hand holding a carving knife. It flickered up and down. Its movements were leisurely. They were leisurely enough for Mr. Verloc to recognize the limb and the weapon. They were leisurely enough for him to take in the full meaning of the portent, and to taste the flavour of death rising in his throat. His wife had gone raving mad - murdering mad.

They were leisurely enough for the first paralyzing effect of this discovery to pass away before a resolute determination to come out victorious from the ghastly struggle with the armed lunatic. They were leisurely enough for Mr. Verloc to elaborate a plan of defence involving a dash behind the table, and the falling of the woman to the ground with a heavy wooden chair. But they were not leisurely enough to allow Mr. Verloc the time to move either hand or foot. The knife was already planted in his breast.

B.2. As yet the fire had not reached the victim; the wind blowing strongly from the west carried it aside. But in a few seconds it gained sufficient ascendancy of his sufferings commenced. For a short space he endured them without a groan. But as the flames mounted, notwithstanding his efforts, the sharpness of the torment overcame him. Placing his hands behind his neck, he made desperate attempts to draw himself further up the stake out of reach of the devouring element. But the iron girdle effectually constrained him. He then lost all command of himself; and his eyes starting from their sockets - his convulsed features - his erect hair and writhing frame - proclaimed the extremity of his agony. He sought relief by adding to his own torture. Crossing his hands upon his breast and grasping either shoulder, he plunged his nails deeply into his flesh. A shuddering groan burst from the whole assemblage. Fresh fagots were added by nightfall and his companions, who moved around the pyre like fiends engaged in some impious rite. The flames rose again, brightly and fiercely. By this time the lower limbs were entirely consumed; and, throwing back his head and uttering a loud and lamentable groan, the wretched victim gave up the ghost.

C.1. As for Mrs. Amelia, she was a woman of such a soft and foolish disposition, that when she heard of anybody unhappy, her heart melted straightway towards the sufferer; and as she had never thought or done anything morally guilty herself, she had not that abhorrence for wickedness which distinguishes moralists much more knowing. If she spoiled everybody who came near her with kindness and compliments - if she begged pardon of all her servants for troubling them to answer the bell - if she apologized to a shop boy who showed her a piece of silk, or made a curtsey to a crossing-sweeper-and she was almost capable of every one of these follies - the notion that an old acquaintance was miserable was sure to soften her heart; nor would

she hear of anybody's being deservedly unhappy. A world under such legislation as hers would not be a very orderly place of abode; but there are not many women, at least not of the rulers, who are of her sort. This lady, I believe, would have abolished all jails, punishments, handcuffs, whippings, poverty, sickness, hunger in the world, and was such a mean-spirited creature that - we are obliged to confess it - she could even forget a mortal injury.

C. 2. If Lucy was naturally clever, her remarks were often just and amusing; and as a companion for half an hour Elinor frequently found her agreeable; but her powers had received no aid from education; she was ignorant and illiterate; and her deficiency of all mental improvement, her want of information in the most common particulars, could not be concealed from Miss Dashwood, in spite of her constant endeavours to appear to advantage. Elinor saw, and pitied her for the neglect of abilities which education might have rendered as respectable; but she saw, with less tenderness of feeling, the thorough want of delicacy, of rectitude, and integrity of mind, which her attentions, her assiduities, her flatteries at the Park betrayed; and she could have no lasting satisfaction in the company of a person who joined in sincerity with ignorance; whose want of instruction prevented their meeting in conversation on terms of equality, and whose conduct towards others made every show of attention and deference towards herself perfectly valueless.

Literary Discrimination Test - Part 2

Rain was universal: a thick robe of it swept from hill to hill, thunder rumbled remote, and between the muffled roars, the downpour pressed on the land with a great noise of eager gobbling, much like that of the pig's trough fresh-filled, as though a vast assembly of the hungered had clamorously seated themselves and fallen to on meats and drinks in silence, save of the chaps. A rapid walker, poetically and humorously minded, gathers multitudes of images on his way. And rain, the heaviest you can meet, is a lively companion, when the resolute pacer scorns the discomfort of wet clothes and squealing boots. South-western rain clouds, too, are never long sullen; they enfold and will have the earth in a good strong glut of the kissing overflow; then, as a hawk with feathers on his beak of the bird in his claw, lifts head, they rise and take veiled feature in long, climbing, watery lines; at any moment they may break the veil and show soft upper cloud, show sun on it, show sky, green near the verge they spring from, of the green of grass in early dew.

The green of the ivy over the window bars and the persisting humidity of the stone-flagged floors made the kitchen look cool without being so. This was the room in Montefort which had changed least: routine abode in its air like a spell. Generations of odors of baking and basting, stewing and skimming, had been absorbed into the lime-washed walls, leaving wood-ash, raked cinders, tea-leaves, wrung-out clothes and lamp-oil freshly predominant. The massive tables, on which jigs had been danced at harvest-homes, was probably stonger than, now, the frame of the house today; slops and stains superficially lay on the bleach from years of scrubbing: the grain of the wood was dinted by chopper blows. The great and ravenous range of which no one now knew how to quell the roaring, was built back into a blackened cave of its own - on its top, a perpetual kettle sent out a hovering thread of steam, tea stewed in a pot all day, and the lid heaved, sank on one or another of the jostling pots, saucepans and cauldrons.

At that time of the year, no blade of grass was visible. The surface of the land, scarred like a battlefield, cumbered by metallic debris - huge, rusting boilers, stranded like buoys, discarded fly-wheels, stacks of trolley-rails, coiled cables, frayed, unravelled, and monstrous dumps of indiscriminate scrap-iron was scattered with boulders of slag and drifts of cinders, as though some volcanic catastrophe had whelmed and blighted it.

Over this slagged waste of carbon and dead metal, a network of narrow-gauge mineral lines spread, as it seemed, haphazard: and on them like derelict engines of war, stood strings of trucks, some empty, some loaded with tawny iron-ore, coal, coke, china-clay, stone and sand - the prime materials of the district; merchandise abandoned, apparently, in this phlegrean desert.

He knocks, receives no answer, opens it, and accidentally extinguishes his candle in doing so. The air of the room is almost bad enough to have extinguished it, if he had not. It is a small room, nearly black with soot, and grease and dirt. In the rusty skeleton of a grate, pinched in the middle as if poverty had gripped it, a red coke fire burns low. In the corner by the chimney stands a deal table and a broken desk, a wilderness marked with a rain of ink. In another corner, a ragged old portmanteau, on one of the two chairs, serves for cabinet or wardrobe; no larger one is needed, for it collapses like the checks of a starved man. The floor is bare; except that one old mat, trodden to shreds of rope-yarn, lies perishing upon the hearth. No curtain veils the darkness of the night, but the discoloured shutters are drawn together, and through the two gaunt holes pierced in them, famine might be staring in.

DISCRIMINATION TEST - PART IV

(a) Read each passage carefully, then choose the preferred passage from each pair, basing your choice on the appeal made by the author's style, treatment of subject, vocabulary, etc. Write down the distinguishing letter and number of the chosen passage-e.g. F.1.
(b) If you can, explain the reasons for your choice.
(c) If you recognize a passage, write down the name of author or novel.
(d) Give an estimate of the number of novels you read, on average, per week.

F. 1. They had worked for their faith in victory-the women as well as the men-in long days of labor, putting a strain on bodies and nerves, a strain just this side of snapping. They, too, had been under fire. They had gone through the bombing-nine months of it. They had heard the drone of planes night after night, and the barrage of guns. They had seen the sky above their own houses blood-red with the leaping of many flames. They had stood amidst the ruins of their own houses. Relatives, children and friends had been buried and killed beneath the rubble. In many cities they had stood on the edge of common graves where many had been laid to rest. They had crawled into table shelters in their little parlors, and had gone nightly below ground, coming up with the daylight to find their homes destroyed. Old women in little houses no stronger than a pack of cards under high-explosive fire had sat under the stairs during those nights of nine months, while the ruins in London spread from street to street, making new gaps and rubble heaps. They had endured all that for this splendid faith in final victory. After so much agony, it was strange how cheerful they were now-they were still capable of excited optimism.

F. 2. The physicians opposed this thoughtless humor of the people, who were running into danger, with all their might, and gave out printed directions, spreading them all over the city and suburbs, advising the people to continue reserved, and to use still the utmost caution in their conduct, notwithstanding the decrease in the disease they terrified them with danger of bringing a relapse on the whole city, telling them how such a relapse might be more fatal and dangerous than the whole visitation that had been already. But it was all to no purpose; the audacious creatures were so possessed with the first joy, and so surprised with the satisfaction of seeing a vast decrease in the weekly death lists, that they were impenetrable by any new terrors, and were sure that the bitterness of death was past. It was to no more purpose to talk to them than to the east wind: they opened shops, went about the streets, did business, and conversed with anybody that came in their way, without enquiring of their health or even being apprehensive of any plague danger from them. This imprudent, rash conduct cost a great many their lives, who had been preserved through the worst of the infection.

G. 1. The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters, and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout these subterranean regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, granting on their rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror-yet she dreaded more to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his servants to pursue her. Frequently she stopped to hear if she was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard a step. Her blood curdled-every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. She condemned her rash flight, which had thus exposed her to his mad rage in a place not likely to draw anybody to her assistance-yet the sound did not seem to come from behind. Cheered with this reflection, she was just about to advance when a door some distance to the left opened gently, but whosoever opened it retreated precipitately on seeing the light. Isabella approached the door that had opened, but a sudden gust of wind met her at the door, extinguished the lamp, and left her in total, dismal darkness.

G. 2. The smith followed the jester down a narrow stairway built in the thickness of the wall, and along a passage that ended abruptly, nor could Beltane see any sign of a door in the solid masonry that barred his way. Here, the jester paused, finger on lip, and extinguished the lantern. Then, in the velvet blackness a hinge creaked noisily, a quivering hand seized his manacled wrist, drawing him on and through a narrow opening that yawned suddenly before them. Thereafter, the hinge creaked again, and they stood side by side within a small chamber where a doorway hung across with heavy curtains, beyond which a light burned. He heard the rattle of dice and a sleepy voice drowsily cursing, and shaking off the clutching desparate talons that strove to stay him, he went softly in the damp gloom and peered through the curtains. He beheld two men, facing each other across a table, whereon was wine. Beltane sprang and caught them each about the neck-together these men sank in his vice-like grasp and lay in a twisted huddle.

H. 1. In the press-gang was one of another aspect, whom by his dress we discovered to be a sergeant of infantry; he came up to me and told me that my son had his choice of sea or land service, whispering at the same time that if he chose the land, he might get off, on procuring another man for his place, and paying a certain sum for his freedom. The money we could just muster up in the house by the assistance of the maid, who produced a green bag, all the little savings of her service; but a man we could not expect to find. My daughter-in-law gazed upon her children with a look of the wildest despair: "My poor infants," said she "your father is forced from you; who shall now labor for your bread? or must your mother beg for herself and you?" I begged her to be patient, but comfort I had none to give her. At last, calling the sergeant aside, I asked him: "Am I too old to be accepted in place of my son?" "Why, I don't know," said he. "You are rather old, to be sure, but yet the money may do much." I put the money in his hand, and, coming back to the children: "Jack" I said, "you are free; live to give your wife and these little ones bread. I will go in your stead; I have but little life to lose, and if I stayed, should add one to the wretches you left behind."

"No" said my son, "I am not that coward you imagine me." "Jack," said I, "I will not be contradicted in this; stay at home, I charge you, and for my sake, be kind to the children."

H. 2. "What do you want with me?" Roderick demanded. "Be brief; I have no time to waste." "For likely lads like you to serve at sea, o'course'" "Press-gang eh' "with a lively sense of peril, "you're not going to have me, my worthy fellow' Hands off' At your peril'" "You're a likely lad, a stout lad, "leered the fellow, a stoutly-built seaman. "A little glazed hat and pigtail would suit you well." "Out of my way'" cried Roderick, swinging his cane threateningly. "On him, lads'"

They were on him instantly and his light cane snapped at the first blow. He struck the foremost one in the mouth, but instantly his arms were gripped, and for all his struggling he was overpowered. Exerting his supreme strength he flung them off, for a moment only. Then the stout fellow, swinging up his arm, felled him to the ground.

He woke to find himself in pitchy blackness. Recollection came in a sudden flood, and he was alive to the full terror of his position. He had been taken by the press-gang; a black and bitter wrath possessed him. One thought was comfort to Roderick; he might be permitted to communicate with his friends, and their influence would speedily effect his rescue. But Diana? He was to have spoken to Diana on that very night. Over his dull brain stole gradually the sense of absolute loss.

I. 1. Mrs. Hubbard thrilled with a new pride when Dave tried to ride the storm. He shortened sail. The Big House had to go, and she grieved at that for his sake, not for her own. She had lived long enough to learn that people and not places give savour to life. She wanted him to cut expenses still further and come to live with her in the Rows, but that she realized, would be a blow to his pride, his most precious possession. He had to keep up appearances to look cheerful and confident when angry creditors called at his office. She didn't understand a word of mergers, holding corporations and what-not, but she nodded her head sagely when he announced his plans, just as she had thirty years before when a curly-headed urchin had confided his plans in her lap. There were stormy meetings of shareholders, but that was true of all company meetings, and the shareholders were afraid of setting the law in motion. Law cost money, and it wasn't sense to throw good money after bad. But directorships were taken one after the other from him. And now the creditors were hot on his track. The news seeped round the family, that Dave was up against it, and one by one its members had occasion to call at the Rows, but they weren't allowed to come alone. Wary wives accompanied, them, reciting inside themselves-"not one penny piece-he's only himself to blame."

I. 2. Early in March, Lydgate's affairs were at that pass in which men begin to say that their promises were given in ignorance, and that the act which they had called impossible to them is becoming manifestly possible. With Dover's ugly security soon to be put into force, with the proceeds of his medical practice immediately absorbed in paying back debts, and with the chance, if the worst were known, of daily supplies being refused on credit, above all with the vision of Rosamund's hopeless discontent continually haunting him, he had begun to see that he should inevitably bend himself to ask help from somebody or other. He considered whether he should write to Rosamund's father, but found, as he had already suspected, that she had applied twice; and father had said that Lydgate must look out for himself. Lydgate came to the conclusion that if he must end by asking for a free loan, his relations with Bulstrode, more at least then with any other man, might take the shape of a claim which was not purely personal. Bulstrode had indirectly helped to cause the failure of his practice, and had also been highly gratified by getting a medical partner in his plans. Yet, though he saw Mr. Bulstrode often, he did not try to use any occasion for this private purpose. He even began spontaneously to consider whether it would be possible to carry out Rosamund's foolish notion, that they should quit the town altogether.

Discrimination Test Part III

Instructions: Choose the preferred passage from each of the two pairs. Read each pair carefully before making your choice. Base your preference on style, vocabulary, treatment of subject, author's attitude to subject, etc. Write down, in as much detail as possible, the reasons for your choice. Give author and/or title of any passage recognized.

D. 1. Early the next day, with the sun shining happily on the lush green pastures, he began to walk purposefully towards his destination. After an hour's travel through the glorious panorama of Nature, on which he gazed with extraordinary pleasure, he saw in front of him a quaint old village built on a hillside. The white stone houses looked from a distance like odd-shaped blocks of ice-cream. As he drew nearer, he observed the local inhabitants up and about their charming country tasks- drawing water, working in the patchwork fields, ambling the roads behind herds of fat and contented cattle and sheep. It was a delightful little spot and he forth- with determined to sojourn there an hour or two, the better to observe these honest toilers in their natural surroundings. On his way up to the nice old inn, he stopped to watch a brawny blacksmith belaboring a red-hot shoe on a massive anvil; the sound was sweet music to his sensitive ears. He hadn't felt so happy for many a long year.

D. 11. The road next day passed below a town not less primitive, it might seem than its rocky perch-white rocks that had long been glistening before him in the distance. Down the dewy paths the people were descending from it to keep a holiday, high and low alike in rough white linen robes. A homely old play was just begun in an open-air theatre, with seats hollowed out of the turf-grown slope. Marius caught the terrified expression of a child in his mother's arms, as it turned from the yawning mouth of a great mask for refuge in her shoulder. The way mounted and descended again, down the steep street of another place all resounding with the noise of metal under the hammer; for every house had its brazier's workshop, the bright objects of brass and copper gleaming like lights in a cave out of their dark roofs and corners. Around the anvils the children were watching the work, or ran to fetch water to the hissing, red-hot metal.

E. 1. Fielding found himself drawn more and more into Miss Quested's affairs. In her place he would have cleared out, sooner than submit to Ronny's half-hearted and distracted civilties, but she was waiting for the hour glass of her sojourn to run through. A house to live in, a garden to walk in during the brief moment of the cool-that was all she asked and he was able to provide them. Disaster had shown her her limitations and he realized now what a fine, loyal character she was. Her humility was touching; she never repined at getting the worst of both worlds; she regarded it as the due punishment of her stupidity. When he hinted to her that a personal apology to the Indian might be seemly, she said sadly: "Of course. I ought to have thought of it myself; my instincts never help me. Why didn't I rush up to him after the trial? Yes, of course I will write him an apology, but please will you dictate it?" Between them they concocted a letter, sincere, and full of moving phrases; but it was not moving as a letter.

E. 11. The first blank grief, after his death, followed by the agony of realization, soon passed and Alyne's life settled into a sad tranquility. She had taken a small flat near her work, and night after night she pored over her father's manuscript, correcting, revising, worrying her young brain into fever over some debatable point. Oh' if only he had been there to settle it for her'. To explain, to elucidate his

own point of view in his precise and impressive accents. In her solitude she could almost see his long thin scholar's hands turning the pages, and tears swept down her face in a storm, leaving them flushed and hot, so that she would have to go to the window, and press her face to the cool pane or throw it open and lean out, gazing into the unfriendly street below. It created a good effect when published, but a few critics pointed out errors and contradictions, and Alayne, holding herself responsible for these, suffered great humiliation. Her dear father's book.